

ROLES IN CIVIL SOCIETY OF PERSONS OF FAITH AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

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Our ecclesiastical tradition – Presbyterianism – or more broadly Reformed (as opposed to Lutheran or Anglican or Free Church/Anabaptist/Baptist) has its genesis in the life and work of a French humanist scholar and lawyer who sided with the Reformation in France – John Calvin.

Calvin's theological commitment resulted in his exile from France and his settling in Geneva – a city that had recently sided with the Reformation, thrown out the ecclesiastical and civil authorities and was in chaos.

A reformed clergyman, William Farel, a fiery head persuaded Calvin to stay and help restore civil and ecclesiastical order to Geneva – which he did and in the process worked out his public theology and wrote the Majestic The Institutes of the Christian Religion – which is still regarded as one of the seed buds of civil liberty, and invented Presbyterianism.

There is more – I will spare you.

Important to understand that our tradition was born in a crisis involving both civil and ecclesiastical authority and from the beginning saw itself rooted in the soil of both Scripture (the ultimate authority in faith and life) and also Civil Society where the Christian faith is lived out by individual Christians but also the Church, the community, the corporate expression of the incarnation, the Body of Christ.

One of the first things Calvin did in Geneva was establish just trading practices in the public market – and establish academies where children could learn to read.

In our Constitution - Book of Order

Great Ends of the Church

- the proclamation of the gospel for the Salvation of humankind,
- the shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship
- the people of God
- the maintenance of divine worship
- the presentation of the truth
- the promotion of social righteousness
- and the exhibition of the Kingdom of God to the world.

Presbyterianism in a worldly piety - that takes its civil and social context seriously and historically has been deeply involved, for better or for worse, in the world.

And a Presbyterian is one who takes his or her citizenship in the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of this world with equal seriousness.

When we gather in Assembly - we talk a lot about the world, express our opinions, invest our resources

-on issues, causes, movements and projects that reflect our sense of God's kingdom and values that reflect God's love for creation.

Peace

Justice

Human Rights

Environment

Health Care

Poverty

And while we do not exert the same influence we used to – and not nearly as much as the National Association of Evangelists, or the S. B. Community

The assumption remains that the Church as Church has a responsibility to speak and act in the world in a way that reflects our sense of God's agenda.

And that individual Presbyterians have a responsibility to take their worldly vocation seriously and at least to listen to the Church (obeying the Church is not part of our vocabulary – we scratch our heads when Cardinal George orders his priests to deny communion to some people and the priests obey.)

We are subject to huge cultural movements – perhaps more so than most because of our intentional worldliness.

19th Century division between virtual pietism and worldly actions resulted in South – or Spirituality of the Church code word to ignore the institution of slavery –

That dic_____ continued in the 20th Century into presence.

Deeper rift in world view between Conservative and Liberal – which has impact on everything we do.

Our People far less inclined to support national policies – which are mostly progressive.

Role of Religious Leader

-to take complexity of Church and its mission seriously

-to lead from within congregation – hoping to inspire, teach, prod –

We treasure motto of clergy as pastor – priest – and prophet –

The task is to balance all three with integrity –

Remembering that _____ Arrows thundered about the loves of Bashann, he wasn't talking to a congregation and didn't have to speak again next Sunday or Sabbath